Amendments to the Specification:

Please amend the paragraph found beginning at page 11, line 16 of the originally filed specification as follows.

> Referring first to FIG. 1, there is presented a schematic diagram that depicts the three tier structure 100 employed in embodiments of the present invention. The multi-tiered structure employs a front end sub-system 101, a core mediation sub-system 102, and a back end subsystem 103. The front end sub-system 101 of the present invention collects call or usage event data from various network sources and **converts** ~~convert~~ them into a predefined usage data format that normalizes device and service specific event data representations. The core mediation sub-system 103 employs a core set of mediation functionality that operates on the normalized data provided by the front end sub-system 101 and thereby associates and combines usage event data records into comprehensive usage detail records. Finally, the back end sub-system 103 according to the present invention converts the aggregated usage detail records into industry standard output formats (such as BAF, EMI or IPDR) and transmits these converted aggregated usage detail records through a variety of protocols to downstream OSS/BSS components. As will be readily appreciated by one skilled in the art, using a three tier structure 100 allows the core mediation sub-system to encompass only completely re-usable operations such that it does not need to be updated as new protocols, systems, services or vendors are added to the network. The present invention thereby provides a data collection platform that is easily adaptable to support usage-sensitive billing for network service providers who operate networks of various different types.

Please amend the paragraph found beginning at page 14, line 21 of the originally filed specification as follows.

Data collection platform systems 300 according to preferred embodiments of the present invention operate in a UNIX environment and electronically connect with various network elements 304 such as one or more hardware devices or databases through high-speed links as depicted in FIG. 3. The platform system 300 depicted in FIG. 3 includes a data collection front end component 301 and a core mediation component 302 having a record processing engine 302'. The front end component 301 supports both polling functionality 301a and spooling functionality 301b for collecting usage event data from network elements and selectively employs functionalities 301a and 301b depending upon how data transmission is normally initiated for a particular network element 304 with which the front end component 301 is communicating. (The front end component is configured by the user to automatically recognize which functionality 301a or 301b to use for a given network element 304.) The front end component 301 captures call or usage event data and typically secures it in storage 301c (such as a database or hard disk). Optionally, of course, the usage event data could be retained only in memory in the alternative. The front end component 301 then validates the data (using validation functionality 301d) and converts it into a normalized format (using normalization functionality 301e) for communication of the record to the record mediation component 302 for later use by the record processing engine 302'. As is described in detail below with respect to FIG. 4, the front end component is pre-configured by the user to associate each network element 304 **with** the proper manner in which to collect usage event data therefrom as well as the proper normalization function by which to convert the usage event data into a normalized format recognized be the core mediation component. As depicted in the figure, more than one front end component 301 can be employed to collect usage event data simultaneously and independently from a variety of disparate network element 304 sources.

(Although not shown in the figure, more than one back end component 303 can also be employed.)